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The illustration depicting the almost overwhelming amount of information coming into our homes courtesy of cable technology was drawn by Brent Bailer.

Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Cartridge Games & Programs

by Bill Kunkel & Frank Laney

Nerves, Strategy and Guile

The Magnavox Arsenal

Magnavox Odyssey², winner of this year's Arcade Award for Best Design, suffers from one major problem in its campaign for the hearts and minds of America's videogamers. Despite its overall excellence, Magnavox is hampered by its relatively small number of game cartridges compared to other units.

This is no small matter. Few video game fans will spend money for a programmable machine that doesn't offer greater variety than the multi-game hard wired units readily obtainable at bargain basement prices. The scarcity of solitaire games among the company's initial selection was especially unfortunate, since the truly devoted gamer wants to play when a willing opponent can't be found.

Magnavox has released several sets of cartridges since the last time Arcade Alley featured the Odyssey². This column will examine some of the most exciting new software, including at least a couple of games sure to chase away those solitaire blues.

Football is a visually exciting and generally successful attempt to do something pretty challenging. Football isn't the easiest sport to convert into a video game, and if Magnavox hasn't completely succeeded, it has nevertheless made a very good try.

The cartridge offers players the choice of both running and passing plays, and it also allows punts and field goals. The person on offense selects the play and then, after the snap of the pigskin, controls the quarterback with the joystick while the computer sends the offense's five other players on their pre-programmed routes. The quarterback's pass can be directed to hit any point on the field, and once it's caught, the joystick automatically switches to control of the receiver.

Defense plays an important role in this video version of football. The defending player also pre-selects a formation, trying

Bill Kunkel is a New York-based writer and veteran video game addict. He shares his mania with Frank Laney, another New York freelancer.

to gain a strategic advantage by outguessing his opponent. This makes it difficult for the offensive team to successfully call the same play over and over, since an alert opponent will immediately see the pattern and align the defenders to anticipate a move tried once too often.

The defensive team's joystick directs a roving linebacker. He can be used to cover one of the potential receivers or, on surefire passing downs, can rush the quarterback. This latter ploy can be very effective against a team that resorts to the long pass too frequently.

The cartridge's shortcomings arise from
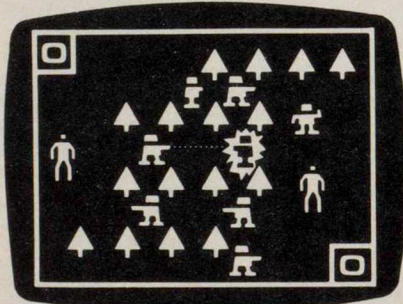
WAR OF NERVES

the manufacturer's decision to put the whole gridiron on the screen at once, instead of breaking it down into 25-30 yard slices as with Bally's *Football* game reviewed here two months ago. The small size of the Magnavox field eliminates the concept of first downs; you've got to score in a series of four plays or cough up the ball.

Another small minus is the absence of kick-off and pass interception returns. Also annoying is the game's quick kick feature, which forces a team to give up the ball whenever the quarterback would have to receive the snap from center standing in the end-zone.

Still, these are minor defects in what is certainly an excellent game. Arcade addicts will especially like the dual levels of play — College (slow) and Professional (fast) — since it provides a chance to get the hang of the game before everything

starts moving around too rapidly.

Computer Golf is a must for those who like to shoot a quick round, but who hate slogging through the wet grass at 5:00 in the morning. This 1980 Arcade Award winner for Best Solitaire Game challenges video golfers with a nine-hole course complete with hazards like trees and rough.

Players direct an on-screen animated golfer with their joystick, the angle of the swing determining the direction of the ball's flight. Pressing the controller's action button starts the golfer's backswing and the bigger the swing, the farther the ball travels.

Computer Golf's most exciting feature is that the view of the course shifts whenever a player succeeds in reaching the green. At this point, a close-up of the green replaces the overview of the entire hole to give much more scope for the putting phase of the game.

Although this is a perfect solitaire game, up to four can play. Each duffer completes the entire hole before the next in rotation tees off. Although the on-screen golfer can drive and putt like a miniature Jack Nicklaus, the code of sportsmanlike conduct takes a beating when the player blows a shot. When the ball hits a tree, the on-screen golfer bashes his club on the ground and shrieks obscenities in computerese. (A realistic touch!)

Thunderball is an electronic pinball game which, for all its thumper bumpers and rainbow colors, ranks as a disappointment. Lack of sufficient variations to the basic game, a consistent flaw in the otherwise fine line of Odyssey² software, is the culprit here.

The designers evidently elected to use the machine's computing power to generate a plethora of sounds and colors. The trappings are extremely eye-catching, but it leaves the game itself a bit too simple for maximum play value.

The cartridge provides only one playfield, but the game does have two different ball speeds. *Normal* could be too fast for many, but *slow motion* is actually an average speed that will sufficiently challenge many players.

The ability to move the flippers slightly to the left or right on their horizontal axis paves the way for some additional strategy. By sliding the flipper assembly to-and-fro, the player can effectively reduce the gap between the flippers, keeping the ball bouncing from thumper to thumper that much longer.

To sum up, *Thunderball* is moderately interesting, if a somewhat uninspired electronic pinball design. At this writing, a hard wired pinball unit might actually be a better bet.

War of Nerves is the first wargame created for programmable home arcades and it's a winner. Two rival generals, each backed by an army of four robot drones, maneuver over a variety of densely

Arcade Alley

wooded terrain in quest of triumphs.

The players command the generals directly, using the joystick, but the robots move semi-autonomously. The drones instinctively head in the direction of the enemy general, periodically firing stun blasts that paralyze opposing drones.

The generals have lots to do in the battle. Not only can they re-animate paralyzed robots with a touch, but pushing the controller's action button issues a call to arms that rallies all still-functioning robots to the side of their leader.

The generals can also be effectively used to lure rival drones away from guarding their commander-in-chief. Players attempting this strategy must remember to leave an avenue of retreat for the general, however. A surrounded general is a sure casualty.

Absolutely first class video and audio effects further distinguish this outstanding game. The generals move with a languid grace, while the robots clump along mechanically around trees and deactivated troops.

A war consists of 10 battles, each with its own unique terrain. After each battle, the winning general jumps up and down for joy, while the loser stands with hands on hips, cursing the fates. When one side wins ten of the individual battles, the war is over and that general gets promoted. This is symbolized by having the victor shoot up to four times original size before going into his victory dance.

This is without doubt one of the most entertaining arcade programs yet introduced. It's a certified "must" for all owners of Magnavox Odyssey[2]. **V**

Gold Star Programmable TV

A 19-inch color TV from Gold Star is claimed to be "the world's first computerized programmable color TV set with infra-red remote control." It allows 16 programs to be pre-set on 15 channels, using the remote panel. A digital clock and memory box display the time and program entry information. Model CNP-804 has a price of $600.00
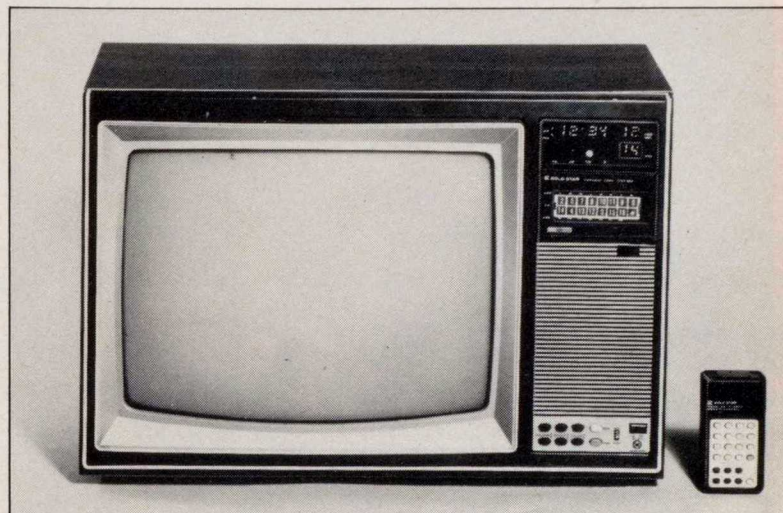
Atari Adds Six Video Games

Space Invaders highlights six new games brought out by Atari, to be played on its programmable Video Computer System. The Invaders game is adapted for home screen from the most successful video arcade game in history. The other game cartridges include: 3-D Tic-Tac-Toe; Golf; Adventure (similar to "Dungeons & Dragons" board game); Night Driver (from Atari's commercial arcade game of same name); and Circus Atari.
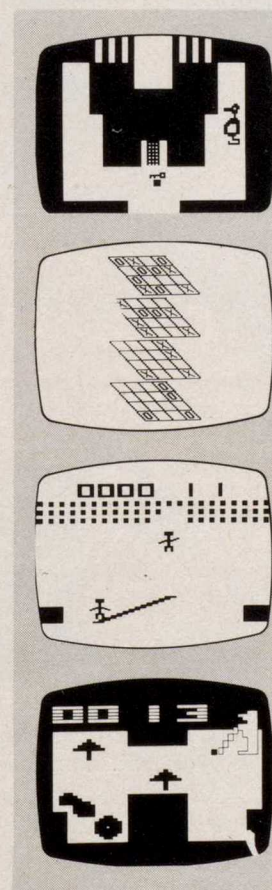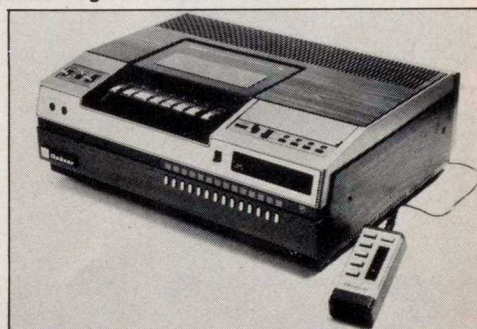
Quasar Special-Effects VHS

A remote control panel with special effects features is included in Quasar's VH5155 videocassette recorder, letting the viewer control channel change, pause, freeze frame, single frame advance and variable slow motion from up to 20 ft. away from the recorder. The three-speed (2/4/6 hour) machine can be pre-set to record up to four different programs one week in advance.
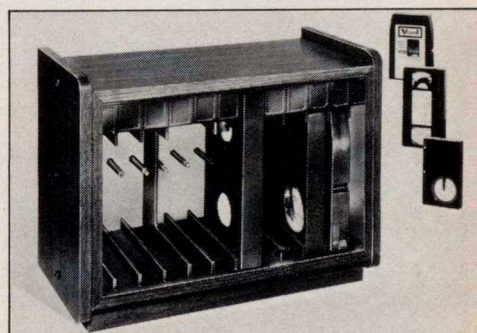
Le-Bo Cassette Storage Modules

Up to 12 VHS or Beta cassettes can be stored in Le-Bo's storage unit, designed in walnut finish and smoked plastic. Ejector system allows easy access of cassettes and removable plastic inserts can be used for index labels to identify each tape. Dimensions are 10¾" x 6⅞" x 15¾" (HxWxL).

JVC 5-In. Color Monitor

Designed for use with its portable VHS system, JVC's color video monitor measures 5-in. (diagonal) and comes with two video and two audio circuits to monitor both picture and sound; LED battery level indicator.

It can be powered by AC, DC car battery, rechargeable battery pack. Rear panel sockets accept inputs from most of the various video systems available, affording full flexibility.

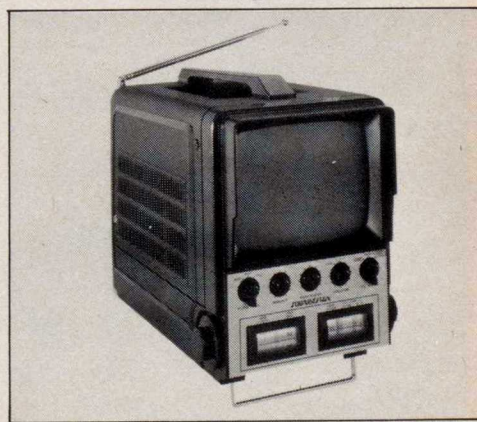The unit, model TM-41AU, is 8.4 lbs. and measures 8 11/16" x 5 5/16" x 13 1/4" (WxHxD).

Soundesign 5-In. TV/Radio

Television as well as FM/AM radio reception is featured on the Soundesign model 7744, with a 5-in. (diagonal) black-and-white screen. It operates from AC, optional battery pack or nine "D" size batteries.

Among features are controls for brightness, contrast and volume, all on front panel; vertical and horizontal hold adjustment; 3-in. speakers; earphone jack; AC cord; telescopic antenna; and built-in handle and stand.

Measuring 8½" x 5¾" x 10" (HxWxD), the set is priced at $250.00.

Gold Star Programmable TV

Quasar Special-Effects VHS

Le-Bo Storage Modules

New Atari Video Games

JVC 5-In. Color Monitor

Soundesign 5-In TV/Radio